

In the Claims:

Please amend the claims as follows:

1. (original) In combination:

a modular sleeve for interfacing modular enhancements to a firearm, said firearm having minimally a receiver with a stock and barrel attached thereto, said barrel defining the forward portion of the firearm and said stock defining the rearward portion of the firearm, said firearm longitudinal axis being defined as horizontal and running from said stock through said receiver to said barrel, said receiver having a forward portion, a top and a rearward portion, said barrel being joined to the forward portion of the receiver, said stock being joined to the rearward portion of the receiver, said barrel being detachable secured to a screw-threaded barrel port on said receiver forward portion by means of a barrel nut having a generally cylindrical body with a central longitudinal threaded opening permitting the nut to be slid over the firearm barrel, said barrel nut threaded opening adapted to engage the screw-threaded barrel port, said barrel nut having a forward end with a plurality of prongs protruding radially outward from the barrel nut body, said modular sleeve comprising:

a universal receiver sleeve having a top side, an underside and two opposite sides connecting said top side with said underside, said universal receiver sleeve being further defined as having a forward portion and a rear portion, the underside of the rear portion of the universal receiver sleeve being fixedly attached to the firearm receiver top, said receiver sleeve forward portion extended forward above the firearm barrel;

an upper handguard piece having a front, rear, top, open bottom, opposing sides, outer side surfaces and inner side surfaces, said top, sides and bottom defining a hollow interior, said front and rear defining an upper handguard piece longitudinal axis, said upper handguard piece top being joined to the underside of the forward portion of the receiver sleeve, each said outer side surface having two longitudinal channels formed therein, a large and shallow upper channel and a bottom interface channel, said channels being separated by a longitudinal element, said bottom interface channel being positioned near to the upper hand guard piece bottom, said upper handguard piece having a small, circular horizontal aperture formed through each upper hand guard piece side near to the rear in the bottom interface channel;

a bottom handguard piece having a front, rear, open top, bottom, opposing sides, outer side surfaces and inner side surfaces, said bottom, sides and top defining a

hollow interior, said front and rear defining a bottom handguard piece longitudinal axis, said bottom handguard piece being removably attached to the upper handguard piece;

wherein, said upper handguard piece and attached bottom handguard piece surround the firearm barrel without touching said barrel;

a modular sleeve yoke, comprising:

a U-shaped device having two upright elements interconnected by a curvilinear element, said device having a top, bottom, front, rear and two opposite sides, said curvilinear element containing said device bottom, said upright elements terminating at the device top, said upright elements being generally rectangular block-like elements protruding forwardly away from said device rear, each upright element having two sides, each upright element having at least one threaded, lateral aperture formed therethrough, said device rear having a channel flange formed on the curvilinear element at the device bottom opening upward;

wherein, said device rear is positioned at and against the forward end of the barrel nut, said device adapted to engage the barrel nut body while the channel flange a plurality of prongs;

a threaded screw inserted through each upper handguard piece small, circular horizontal aperture for threaded engagement with each device upright element threaded, lateral aperture.

2. (original) The combination as recited in claim 1; further comprising:
an indentation formed about one side of each said device, upright element, threaded, lateral aperture, each said indentation adapted to receive a screw head.
3. (currently amended) The combination as recited in claim 1 ~~claim 2~~, further comprising:
a rectangular notch formed in the channel flange at the device bottom.
4. (currently amended) The combination as recited in claim 1 ~~claim 3~~, wherein:
said firearm has a conventional handguard delta ring, a delta ring spring, and a delta ring lock washer, mounted on said screw-threaded barrel port;
wherein said delta ring substantially covers the barrel nut and a portion of the special yoke.

5. (currently amended) The combination as recited in claim 1 ~~claim 4~~, wherein:
said barrel nut and modular sleeve yoke are each made from steel.

6. (original) In combination:

a modular sleeve for interfacing modular enhancements to a firearm, said firearm having minimally a receiver with a stock and barrel attached thereto, said barrel defining the forward portion of the firearm and said stock defining the rearward portion of the firearm, said firearm longitudinal axis being defined as horizontal and running from said stock through said receiver to said barrel, said receiver having a forward portion, a top and a rearward portion, said barrel being joined to the forward portion of the receiver, said stock being joined to the rearward portion of the receiver, said barrel being detachable secured to a screw-threaded barrel port on said receiver forward portion by means of a barrel nut having a generally cylindrical body with a central longitudinal threaded opening permitting the nut to be slid over the firearm barrel, said barrel nut threaded opening adapted to engage the screw-threaded barrel port, said barrel nut having a forward end with a plurality of prongs protruding radially outward from the barrel nut body, said modular sleeve comprising:

a universal receiver sleeve having a top side, an underside and two opposite sides connecting said top side with said underside, said universal receiver sleeve being further defined as having a forward portion and a rear portion, the underside of the rear portion of the universal receiver sleeve being fixedly attached to the firearm receiver top, said receiver sleeve forward portion extended forward above the firearm barrel;

an upper handguard piece having a front, rear, top, open bottom, opposing sides, outer side surfaces and inner side surfaces, said top, sides and bottom defining a hollow interior, said front and rear defining an upper handguard piece longitudinal axis, said upper handguard piece top being joined to the underside of the forward portion of the receiver sleeve, each said outer side surface having two longitudinal channels formed therein, a large and shallow upper channel and a bottom interface channel, said channels being separated by a longitudinal element, said bottom interface channel being positioned near to the upper hand guard piece bottom, said upper handguard piece having a small, circular vertical aperture formed through the longitudinal element along each upper hand guard piece side near to the upper handguard piece rear, said upper hand guard piece side having a notch formed along the bottom at the rear;

a bottom handguard piece having a front, rear, open top, bottom, opposing sides, outer side surfaces and inner side surfaces, said bottom, sides and top defining a hollow interior, said front and rear defining a bottom handguard piece longitudinal axis, said bottom handguard piece being removably attached to the upper handguard piece;

wherein, said upper handguard piece and attached bottom handguard piece surround the firearm barrel without touching said barrel;

a modular sleeve yoke, comprising:

a U-shaped device having two upright elements interconnected by a curvilinear element, said device having a top, bottom, front, rear and two opposite sides, said curvilinear element containing said device bottom, said upright elements terminating at the device top, said upright elements having generally rectangular block-like elements protruding laterally sideways, each laterally protruding block-like elements having a top with at least one threaded, vertical aperture formed there through, said device rear having a channel flange formed on the curvilinear element at the device bottom opening upward;

wherein, said device rear is positioned at and against the forward end of the barrel nut, said device adapted to engage the barrel nut body while the channel flange a plurality of prongs;

a threaded screw inserted through each upper handguard piece small, circular vertical aperture for threaded engagement with each device upright element protruding block-like element threaded, vertical aperture;

wherein, each the top of each laterally protruding block-like element engages each upper hand guard piece side notch.

7. (original) The combination as recited in claim 6, further comprising:

an indentation formed on the top of each laterally protruding block-like element said device, about each threaded, vertical aperture.

8. (currently amended) The combination as recited in claim 6 ~~claim 7~~, further comprising:

a rectangular notch formed in the channel flange at the device bottom.

9. (currently amended) The combination as recited in claim 6 claim-8, wherein:
said firearm has a conventional handguard delta ring, a delta ring spring, and a delta ring lock washer, mounted on said screw-threaded barrel port;
wherein said delta ring substantially covers the barrel nut and a portion of the special yoke.
10. (currently amended) The combination as recited in claim 6 claim-8, wherein:
said barrel nut and modular sleeve yoke are each made from steel.
11. (newly added) A system for attaching modular enhancements to a firearm, said firearm having a receiver, said receiver having a top and a barrel receiving receptacle at a forward end thereof, said firearm further including a barrel received in said barrel receiving receptacle and a barrel nut received around an outer surface of said barrel receiving receptacle to retain said barrel within said barrel receiving receptacle, said system comprising:
a receiver sleeve having a top, an underside, a forward portion and a rear portion, wherein the underside of the rear portion of the receiver sleeve is configured and arranged to be fixedly attached to the top of said firearm receiver and said forward portion of said receiver sleeve is configured to extend above at least a portion of the firearm barrel;
a handguard piece depending from the underside of the forward portion of the receiver sleeve, said handguard piece having a side wall that forms a hollow interior cavity, a forward end, and a rearward end, wherein said sidewall of said handguard piece surrounds the firearm barrel without touching said barrel, said rearward end of said handguard piece being adjacent said forward end of said receiver when said receiver sleeve is attached to said firearm receiver; and
a yoke configured and arranged for engagement with said barrel nut, said yoke extending forwardly into said rearward end of said handguard piece, said yoke being further configured and arranged for engagement with said rearward end of said handguard piece,
wherein said yoke supports said handguard piece relative to said receiver.

12. (newly added) The system of claim 11 wherein said yoke includes means for releasably engaging said barrel nut, and further includes means for releasably engaging said rearward end of said handguard piece.

13. (newly added) The system of claim 12 wherein said means for releasably engaging said barrel nut comprises a flange channel.

14. (newly added) The system of claim 12 wherein said means for releasably engaging said rearward end of said handguard piece comprises a fastener extending through an aperture in said rearward end of the handguard piece, and into a threaded aperture in said yoke.

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15. (newly added) The system of claim 11, wherein said top side of said receiver sleeve includes a dovetail interface element extending longitudinally along at least a portion of the top of the receiver sleeve, said dovetail interface element being configured and arranged for the mounting of ancillary equipment.

16. (newly added) The system of claim 11, further comprising:
at least one external dovetail interface element arranged on the sidewall of said handguard piece, said external dovetail element being configured and arranged for the mounting of ancillary equipment.

17. (newly added) The system of claim 16 wherein said at least one external dovetail interface element is removably secured to said sidewall of said handguard piece.

18. (newly added) The system of claim 16, wherein said at least one external dovetail interface element comprises:
three external dovetail interface elements arranged on the sidewall of said handguard piece at 3:00, 6:00 and 9:00 positions.

19. (newly added) The system of claim 17 wherein said external dovetail interface elements are removably secured to said sidewall of said handguard piece.

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19. (newly added) A system for attaching modular enhancements to a firearm, said firearm having a receiver, said receiver having a top and a barrel receiving receptacle at a forward end thereof, said firearm further including a barrel received in said barrel receiving receptacle and a barrel nut received around an outer surface of said barrel receiving receptacle to retain said barrel within said barrel receiving receptacle, said system comprising:

a receiver sleeve having a top, an underside, a forward portion and a rear portion, wherein the underside of the rear portion of the receiver sleeve is configured and arranged to be fixedly attached to the top of said firearm receiver and said forward portion of said receiver sleeve is configured to extend above at least a portion of the firearm barrel;

an upper handguard piece depending from the underside of the forward portion of the receiver sleeve, said upper handguard piece having a side wall that forms a hollow interior cavity, a forward end, and a rearward end, wherein said sidewall of said handguard piece at least partially surrounds the firearm barrel without touching said barrel, said rearward end of said handguard piece being adjacent said forward end of said receiver when said receiver sleeve is attached to said firearm receiver; and

a yoke configured and arranged for engagement with said barrel nut, said yoke extending forwardly toward said rearward end of said upper handguard piece, said yoke being further configured and arranged for engagement with said rearward end of said upper handguard piece,

wherein said yoke supports said upper handguard piece relative to said receiver.

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20. (newly added) The system of claim 19 wherein said yoke includes means for releasably engaging said barrel nut, and further includes means for releasably engaging said rearward end of said upper handguard piece.

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21. (newly added) The system of claim 20 wherein said means for releasably engaging said barrel nut comprises a flange channel.

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22. (newly added) The system of claim 20 wherein said means for releasably engaging said rearward end of said upper handguard piece comprises a fastener extending through an aperture in said rearward end of the upper handguard piece, and into a threaded aperture in said yoke.

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~~23~~. (newly added) The system of claim ²⁰~~19~~, wherein said top side of said receiver sleeve includes a dovetail interface element extending longitudinally along at least a portion of the top of the receiver sleeve, said dovetail interface element being configured and arranged for the mounting of ancillary equipment.

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~~24~~. (newly added) The system of claim ²⁰~~19~~, further comprising:
at least one external dovetail interface element arranged on the sidewall of said handguard piece, said external dovetail element being configured and arranged for the mounting of ancillary equipment.

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~~25~~. (newly added) The system of claim ²⁵~~24~~ wherein said at least one external dovetail interface element is removably secured to said sidewall of said handguard piece.

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~~26~~. (newly added) The system of claim ²⁵~~24~~, wherein said at least one external dovetail interface element comprises:
three external dovetail interface elements arranged on the sidewall of said handguard piece at 3:00, 6:00 and 9:00 positions.

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~~27~~. (newly added) The system of claim ²⁷~~26~~ wherein said external dovetail interface elements are removably secured to said sidewall of said handguard piece.

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~~28~~. (newly added) A system for attaching modular enhancements to a firearm, said firearm including a receiver having a forward portion and a top, and further including a barrel joined to the forward portion of the receiver, said system comprising:
a receiver sleeve having a top, an underside, a forward portion and a rear portion, wherein the underside of the rear portion of the receiver sleeve is configured and arranged to be fixedly attached to the top of said firearm receiver and said forward portion of said receiver sleeve is configured to extend above at least a portion of the firearm barrel;

a handguard piece depending from the underside of the forward portion of the receiver sleeve, said handguard piece having a side wall that forms a hollow interior cavity, a forward end, and a rearward end, wherein said sidewall of said handguard piece surrounds the firearm barrel without touching said barrel, said rearward end of

said handguard piece being adjacent said forward end of said receiver when said receiver sleeve is attached to said firearm receiver; and

a supporting yoke element coupled to said forward portion of said receiver, said support yoke extending forwardly from said receiver into said rearward end of said handguard piece, said yoke being configured and arranged for engagement with said rearward end of said handguard piece,

wherein said supporting yoke element supports said handguard piece relative to said receiver.

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(newly added) A system for attaching modular enhancements to a firearm, said firearm including a receiver having a forward portion and a top, and further including a barrel joined to the forward portion of the receiver, said system comprising:

a receiver sleeve having a top, an underside, a forward portion and a rear portion, wherein the underside of the rear portion of the receiver sleeve is configured and arranged to be fixedly attached to the top of said firearm receiver and said forward portion of said receiver sleeve is configured to extend above at least a portion of the firearm barrel;

a handguard piece depending from the underside of the forward portion of the receiver sleeve, said handguard piece having a side wall that forms a hollow interior cavity, a forward end, and a rearward end, wherein said sidewall of said handguard piece surrounds the firearm barrel without touching said barrel, said rearward end of said handguard piece being adjacent said forward end of said receiver when said receiver sleeve is attached to said firearm receiver; and

a supporting element engaged with to said forward portion of said receiver, said supporting element extending forwardly from said forward portion of said receiver into said rearward end of said handguard piece, said supporting element being configured and arranged for engagement with said rearward end of said handguard piece,

wherein said supporting element supporting said handguard piece relative to said receiver.

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30. (newly added) A system for attaching modular enhancements to a firearm, said firearm having a receiver, said receiver having a top and a barrel receiving receptacle at a forward end thereof, said firearm further including a barrel received in said barrel receiving receptacle and a barrel nut received around an outer surface of said barrel receiving receptacle to retain said barrel within said barrel receiving receptacle, said system comprising:

an upper handguard piece having a forward end and a rearward end, and further having a dovetail rail extending longitudinally between the forward end and the rearward end;

a U-shaped supporting yoke removably secured to said rearward end of said upper hand guard,

said U-shaped supporting yoke including engagement surfaces configured to cooperatively engage an outer surface of said barrel nut and thereby support said upper handguard relative to said barrel nut,

wherein said upper handguard extends from said forward end of said upper receiver forwardly above said barrel without engaging said barrel,

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31. The system of claim 30, wherein said upper handguard piece includes opposing side walls that extend outwardly and downwardly from said dovetail rail, said opposing side walls terminating in opposing interface channels,

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32. The system of claim 31 wherein each of said longitudinally extending interface channels has an upper wall and a lower wall, and said lower wall comprises a plurality of spaced wall segments,

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33. The system of claim 30 further comprising a bottom firearm accessory, said upper handguard piece and said bottom firearm accessory including interfitting mating formations for removably securing said bottom firearm accessory to said upper handguard piece,

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34. The system of claim 31 further comprising a bottom firearm accessory having opposing side walls that extend outwardly and upwardly, said opposing sidewalls including protrusions that interfittingly engage within said interface channels,

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35. The system of claim 32 further comprising a bottom firearm accessory having opposing sidewalls that extend outwardly and upwardly, said opposing sidewalls including protrusions that interfittingly engage within said interface channels, said protrusions comprising a plurality of spaced protrusions that matingly interfit between said spaced wall segments.